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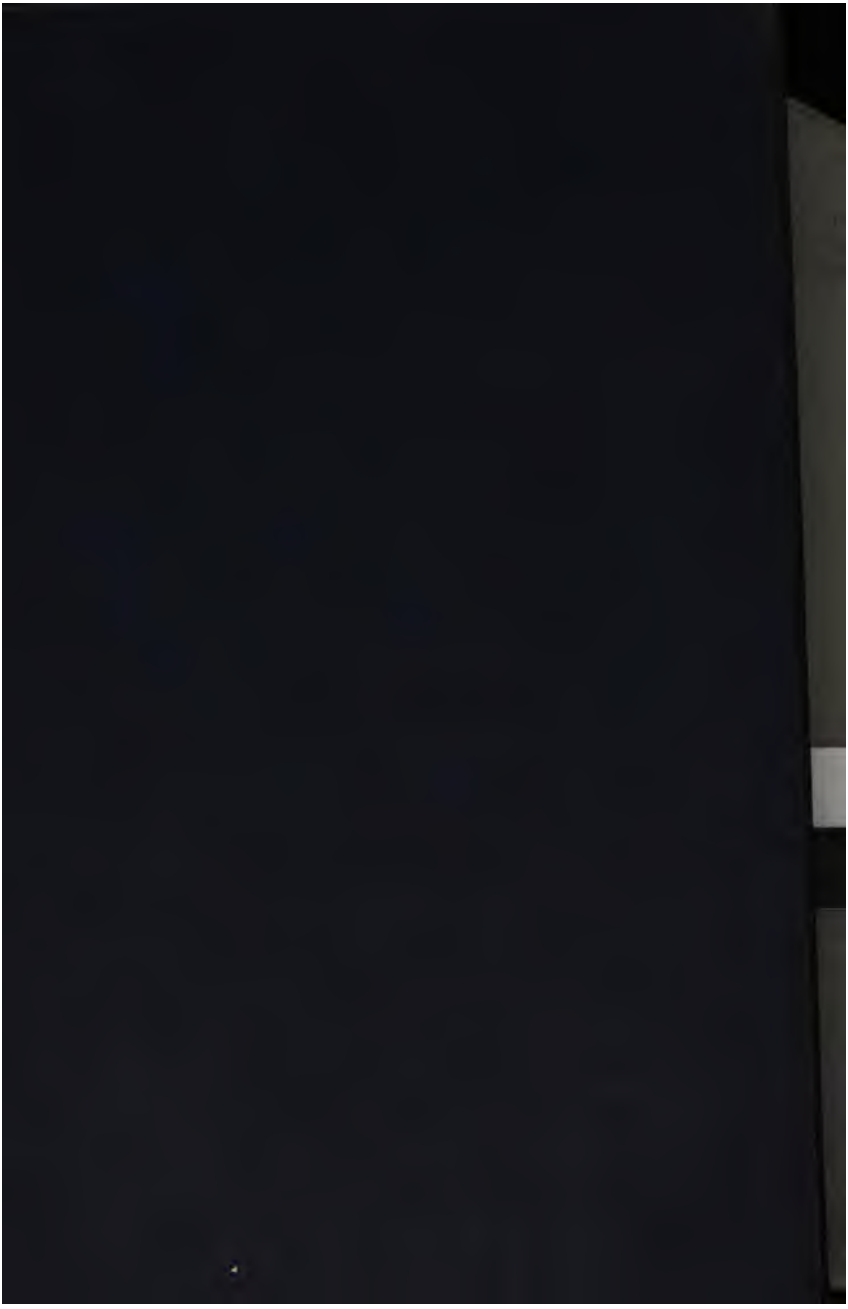

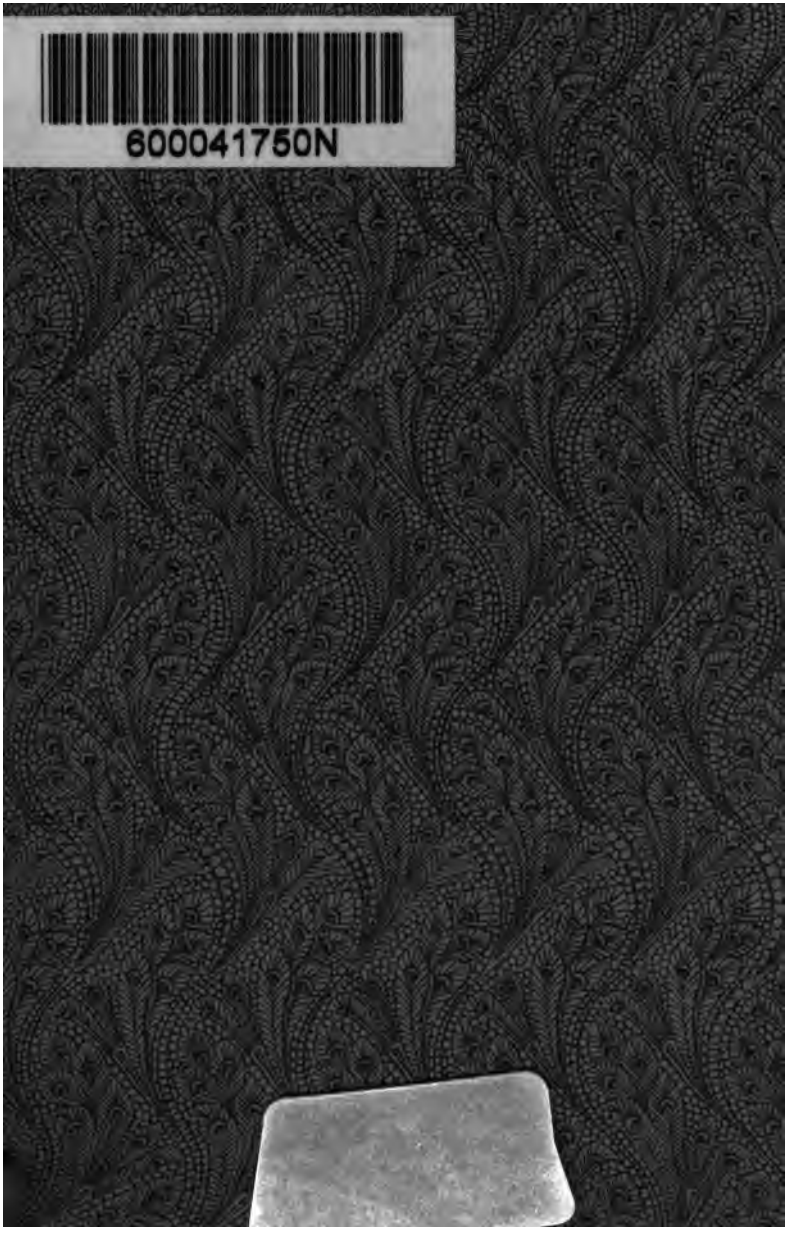
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THE LAMB OF GOD.

Expositions in the Writings of St John.

BY

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A.,
AUTHOR OF "THE INCARNATE SAVIOUR," ETC.

EDINBURGH:
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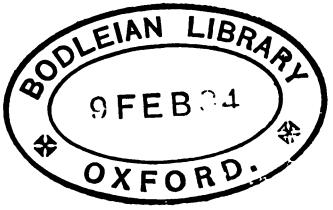

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PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH critical discussion would obviously be out of place in a volume like the present, it is perhaps permissible to indicate the important bearings the subject has on the Johannine controversy. The figure of the Lamb holds so prominent a place in the fourth gospel that it is regarded by Baur as one of the great dogmatic points in the interest of which that gospel was penned, and for the sake of which the writer deliberately changed the day already known in the church as that of the Lord's Death. This fundamental and peculiar conception of the fourth gospel also rules the Apocalypse; is perhaps the main figure; is associated with what at first seem startling incongruities; and is met with no fewer than twenty-seven times. Besides, the Saviour is not only the Lamb but the slain Lamb, the word used signifying sacrifice — a conception

naturally allying itself with that contained in the nineteenth chapter of the fourth gospel, where stress is laid on the fact that blood flowed from Jesus at His death. The whole subject is discussed by Dr Milligan in his thoughtful paper, "St John's Gospel and the Apocalypse" (*Contemporary Review*, Aug. 1871), as well as in a series of papers in the *Expositor*, 1882.

The various English and foreign commentaries have been used in the preparation of this little book, and I have endeavoured to own my main obligations. I am anxious to acknowledge my great indebtedness throughout the whole volume to the writings of Dr Maclaren and Dean Church, more especially the former. So far as I am aware there is no separate work on the subject.

KELSO, *Jan.* 1883.

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I.

HOLY, HARMLESS, AND UNDEFILED.

Wrath by His meekness,
And by His health sickness,
Are driven away
From our immortal day.

I.

HOLY, HARMLESS, AND UNDEFILED.

THE first words that pointed John to Christ were those of the Baptist—"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." The profound implications that lay in these words were probably little perceived at first, but they became clearer with growing years and ripening experience. And long after he who had delivered the message was lying in his bloody grave, after the death on the cross, when the Evangelist was in the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, he lifted up his eyes from the rocks around him and the tossing sea that girdled them, and saw in the depth of the sanctities of heaven the Lamb as it had been slain.

He found no greater word to describe the glory of the noon than that through which he had seen the dawn. It was the same light in

its zenith as when it first greeted him through the mist. Surely it is worth while to investigate a revelation like this, which was as much to the aged seer as it was to the young fisherman. How beautiful is a life of which the early days, the middle, and the latest hold the same convictions, only growing with the man's growth, and widening with his experience. How beautiful when the life is based on truths which no experience can overthow, which experience only renders more precious; and how different from the lives of men who flit restlessly from one faith to another and find no abiding home. It is beautiful when we see the father and the young man and the child bound together by the faith which goes through all the stages of life, the end circling round the beginning, only with a deeper conviction and a stronger love at last.

To understand the meaning of this profound phrase we must go back to the Old Testament, in which the mind of him who first uttered it was steeped. Perhaps the passage which was most clearly before him as he spoke was that in the climax of evangelical prophecy where Jesus is described as a Lamb led to the slaughter,

and where it is said that as a sheep before his shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth. Forty days before Christ had been baptised, and in the interval John had no doubt been meditating deeply on the prophecies that announced the Messiah; and this would stand more clearly before his mind than any. Besides, through those days and before them, he had been hearing countless stories of grief and sin from those who came to be baptised of him; and would he not think of one into whose ear sorrow would never be sobbed in vain—one who was to deal with sin adequately and finally by taking it away? "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."

But along with this we must include a reference to the Paschal Lamb. Few thoughts in John's Gospel are more distinct than that of the relation of Jesus Christ to the Paschal Sacrifice and Feast. The Passover, which was the most conspicuous symbol of the Messianic deliverance, was not far off; flocks of lambs were passing by to Jerusalem to be offered at the coming feast, and the sight may have

brought home the thought. Further, there is no difficulty in believing that the forerunner, who had deeply meditated the Messianic prophecies and the meaning of the sacrifices, saw, with prophetic insight, that Christ was to suffer, thus standing for a time on a higher level than any of the disciples.*

We find in the expression the idea of sacrifice central to the Bible—the fundamental thought of the Christian life—the Alpha and Omega of John's experience and faith. "Without expiation, and the ideas connected with it, what," says Vinet, "is Christianity?" So our object is to show the foundation and meaning of this great idea of sacrifice, and then its large unfoldings as we find them in the Revelation of St John, where we are told of the Lamb enthroned, the Lamb opening the sealed book, the Lamb making war, the Lamb leading, and feeding, and lightening his people, the Lamb overwhelming his enemies with his wrath.

The basis of all is found in the words of the Apostle Peter—"A Lamb without blemish and

* For a defence of the Isaianic reference see the recent commentary of Keil (Leipzig, 1880). The other view is defended in the thoughtful commentary of Milligan and Moulton, with which compare Westcott.

without spot;" or, as it is phrased by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in describing the High priest who became us—"Holy, harmless, and undefiled." The ideas brought before us by words like these are, first, Christ's innocence and gentleness: and, secondly, the bearing of these upon His sufferings and death.

I.

1. The innocence of Christ signifies that He was absolutely free from every taint of evil. He was not only free from all evil, he was full of all good. When we speak of His holiness we point to the positive element—His possession of all good. When we speak of His innocence we lay stress rather on the complete absence of evil from His every thought, word, and deed. Even those who make it often fail to understand all that is implied in this immense claim. It means that the boundary lines between right and wrong, often to us more or less obscured, were to Him always as clear as noon. The wonderful skill with which He maps out the frontiers of righteousness, and the nice discrimination with which He goes so far,

and no farther, is the perpetual wonder of moral teachers. It signifies, besides, that He perilled His whole claim upon any, even the minutest fact of His life. All other men, even the best, are only right on the whole, and we are content and thankful if they reach that point of excellence. We should rightly count the critic no less foolish than ungenerous who would reject and condemn a great and noble character because of the flaws and errors that make it human. We are glad to accept our heroes with far greater limitations and blots, and to overlook even much shortcoming, in consideration of much attainment. Our temptation is unconsciously to transfer this line of reasoning to Christ, and to look suspiciously upon those who claim His example as a perpetual rule, and who say that to deny His perfection in one, even the least point, is to deny it in all. But, as it has been forcibly said, Christ was either sinless or sinful. Between sinlessness and sinfulness there is no middle term. The quantity of sin is not the point in question; it is its existence. Should the denier be able to make good any charge, even the least, against the moral perfection of Christ, the whole scheme of

salvation vanishes like a dream, and He Himself needs redemption, instead of being a Redeemer: Our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins.*

But great and sweeping as this claim is, the innocence of Christ means something more. It means something positive. When we speak of innocence we think of the bloom and fragrance there is about childhood—that childhood which He Himself was pleased to make a type of man's regained Paradise, when He said—"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Innocence, it has been said, has something strange and wonderful about it. It has a look of exile, as of something heavenly detained in slavery upon earth, a look of peril and of helplessness, such as we sometimes see in children.† This spotless, childlike innocence Jesus the "Eternal Child" kept to the very last.

This innocence was not ignorance. With childhood it is; and men justly count it a high crime to violate the sanctities of childhood. To

*See J. B. Mozley, "Of Christ Alone Without Sin," in *Contemporary Review*, March 1868, p. 491.

† F. W. Faber.

break in upon that sacred ignorance which makes the sunshine round the head of a young child ripple into a softer gold, to cause one of those little ones to stumble, is to deserve to be thrown with a mill-stone round one's neck into the depths of the sea, and this in the judgment even of the most abandoned. For to lose ignorance is to lose innocence. The evil knowledge lays hold of something evil within, and though no outward transgression may follow, we know too well that in the soul a battle has been fought and lost. But He knew all things. He speaks with a strange familiarity of vice and crime. He knows what young men do when they leave the father's house, and plunge into transgression in a strange country. He knows how they feel when the wild pleasure thrills them, and how when the reaction comes, when the money is spent and friendly doors are closed, and how when the spirit turns faintly to its father and its home. He knows how sinners entice, and how the son consents. All these things he knows, and has described in imperishable words; and yet the bloom of his innocence is unsmirched through all.

Neither was his an untried innocence. What

we call a child's innocence is never of course complete, and disappears when temptation comes; and the prayer for childhood and for age is—"Lead us not into temptation." Christ's sinlessness did not imply a freedom from the burden of maintaining a contest with evil. But it implies that there was no yielding in the contest. He met Satan in conflict face to face and overthrew him. He was tried in the silence of his spirit all through his life with the wiles of the devil, and upon the cross the enemy was there, plying him with the old deceits to the very last. And yet, sore as the temptation was, there was not so much as even the least compliance in thought, and all the temptation of the Wicked One no more defiled him than the shadow of a cloud stains the snow.

2. The image of the Lamb suggests not only the innocence, but also the gentleness of Christ; "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild."

It is in this aspect that he first lays hold of us, and in this aspect he continues most clearly to reveal himself. This gentleness is seen both in what he did and in what he endured. We know how gently he used his power; with what a delicate sympathy he conferred his gifts, how

when he healed the leper he put out his pure hand and came near the need that he might relieve the pain, how he touched the little children in their innocence, and the harlots in their filth, how he refused to be the judge of men because he had come to be their Saviour. But that is not the most remarkable aspect of his gentleness. In the gentle use of power he was well skilled through his long rule of the kingdom of the eternal patience. What is most striking and impressive is the gentleness with which he endured suffering. The great mystery of suffering came up in his history in its sharpest form. His life was confessed by all men pure, sinless, perfect in beauty, and yet he suffered. The contradiction rises to its superlative degree, and we stand amazed. Not only was he man, but he suffered as the uncreated and eternal Son of God. It is as if a star should withdraw its beams and forget to shine that he should pass through an experience strange and awful for a man, so much more strange and mysterious for God incarnate. Besides, suffering was new to him. He learned obedience not as we do in the way of learning to exercise a disposition which otherwise is not ours—not in the sense of having

his will moulded and tempered through submission. We know that from the beginning, before the shadow had passed over him, the very inmost of his will was in harmony with the will of God. But that inmost will needed to be wrought out in life. He had to make practical acquaintance by experience with the act of submission. He had to learn obedience in actual exercise, and the discipline through which he passed was infinitely more severe than ours. His obedience had to maintain itself in the face of greater and greater demands upon it; and as he had to meet these demands rising with the rising tide of things which he suffered, he entered ever more deeply into the experience of what obedience was.*

And how gently he bore his sufferings! We remember the impressive silence which he maintained before the furious and malignant storm of accusation at the bar of Pilate. We remember how, amidst a series of insults and torture which makes us shudder to read of, when the thorns were crushed into his brow, and the faded scarlet thrown round him, and the reed put into his hand and then wrested from him

* Cf. Davidson on Hebrews, v. 8.

and used to strike him again and again, not one word of reproach, or protest, or anger escaped his lips. We remember "what a grace he had, even in his dying hour;" how he prayed when the nails were driven through His hands, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" how He opened Paradise to the penitent thief at His side; how He died with no word of bitterness upon His lips. And therein, as in all His life, we behold His exceeding gentleness.

This gentleness was not weakness, for, as suggestive hints tell us again and again, there dwelt in Him energies which could have routed and destroyed all His enemies. And He was watched by legions of angels, every angel with his hand upon his sword, so that it may not be too much to say that His difficulty was to restrain and refrain from using these powers. His gentleness in suffering receives a new meaning when considered as the gentleness of the strong one who bore not by the constraint of weakness but by the stronger constraint of love.

And still further, this gentleness was not softness of temper, not moral indifference or weakness. To confound the majestic and solemn tenderness of Christ with weak good nature is

profoundly to misconceive it. The Lamb of God has seven horns. The heat that destroys and the heat that quickens both come from one source. His grief was sometimes mingled with anger, and, when need was, He could rebuke and silence those who opposed Him. But this power also He rarely used, and the image of the gentle Christ is that left on our minds after a perusal of His whole life.

II.

The innocence and gentleness of Christ, on account of which He is called the Lamb of God, help us to realise what is very difficult for us adequately to conceive, the horror of His sufferings. We do not feel as we should the sufferings of Jesus, partly because into their greatest depths we are not able to see very far, and partly because in this world of sin and pain it is so much a matter of course that a man should suffer, and we ourselves become so familiar with suffering that it is hard to spare thought or sympathy for those who share it with us, however great their share may be.

Every one who comes into this world and seeks a career there, must bear his part of the

ills of this tried life. He must have his experience of the shocks and overthrows and strange reversals and bitter bereavements of earth; and, unless his suffering reaches some unparalleled height, we can scarcely spare a thought for it. And so it is that it has been found most difficult to stimulate our dull and selfish imaginations into any adequate feeling about the suffering of Christ. But nothing will help us more to throw away the brazen armour of our selfishness, and to feel how terrible an expression of human sin the Cross was, as to conceive of the sufferer as the Lamb of God. Men must be strangely hardened and deadened before they cease to respond to the suffering of a helpless and innocent being. Suffering wantonly and purposelessly inflicted on dumb and helpless animals moves in minds not altogether devilish an instant horror and sympathy. More especially when those who are so tortured show, as they sometimes do, their love in the very midst of their agony, do we feel the dreadfulness of the deed. Those "who would mangle the living dog that had loved them and fawned at their knee," raise execration in the hearts even of the most

criminal. That an innocent and unconscious child should be put to torture, is an idea so sickening that we cannot dwell upon it. The legend of one such deed has lingered about an English town for hundreds of years. Now, we are warranted in taking those ideas and transferring them to Christ. He was more innocent than any child, more loving, more gentle, and by the constraint of His love, more helpless than any other could be. And it was He whom men chose and did to death in agony and in shame. This aspect of Christ's suffering, if we dwell upon it, may make us feel as those did who, when they saw it, smote their breasts and returned. This is the end of human nature apart from God—to nail upon the cross the Son of God Himself; and in this crime we all of us had a share. In the cross, looked at from this point of view, we have the culmination and the condemnation of human guilt; and were this the only point of view from which we could regard it, it would fill us with horror and despair.

But a profounder thought leads us to see in the death of the Lamb of God not merely the condemnation, but also the atonement for human

guilt. He died in the fulness of power, of consciousness, and of love. Viewed from the human side His death was a murder, but deeper knowledge reveals it as the determinate counsel of God, and the expression of His own loving will. There is more in the Cross than at first we dreamt of. If it opens the great depths of man's sin, it opens also the greater depths of God's mercy.

As we gaze heart-stricken on the Sufferer the calm lips will say to us the old, old words, "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee: go in peace."

II.

THE SIN-BEARING LAMB.

Not all the blood of beasts,
  On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
  Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the Heavenly Lamb,
  Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
  And richer blood than they.

My faith would lay her hand,
  On that dear head of thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
  And there confess my sin.

My soul looks back to see,
  The burden thou didst bear,
When hanging on the cursed tree,
  And knows her guilt was there.

II.

THE SIN-BEARING LAMB.

THE great difference between Christianity and other religions is that in Christianity the work of salvation is accomplished by God. In other religions and systems of moral reformation the work of emancipation is one that man himself must accomplish. They begin by telling him what he has to do to avert the wrath and to win the favour of Deity. They differ, indeed, in their requirements, but this fundamental idea is common to every one of them, which shows that it is a natural and congenial thought of the human mind. The true religion, on the other hand, commences by contradicting and overturning this thought. It tells us that salvation, so far from being a work of man, is the result of a long and arduous work of sacrifice accomplished by God Himself. It tells us not what man has to do to win God, but what God has done to win man. It comes to him not as an

elaborate code of rules which he must obey, but as a free gift which he is to receive; and the reason why so many fail to gain salvation is because they make the fatal mistake of supposing that it is something that they must work out, instead of something that they must receive from the God who Himself has wrought it out.

When John says, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," he is manifestly pointing back to the sacrificial system which pervades the Bible from the beginning to the end. He is thinking of the great process which led up to Christ. He remembers how from the beginning lambs were slain continually —how they were offered up by Abel, Noah, and Abraham—how the altar of God was ever red with blood; and he sees Jesus Christ as coming to complete these sacrifices and terminate them by the offering of Himself. So to understand the force of the passage we must look to these sacrifices, and no sufficient explanation of them can be given which does not admit that they implied the substitution of the victim in place of the offerer, and the acceptance of a satisfaction for the offence; in other words, that they were both vicarious and expiatory. And so

Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice, is to be viewed as satisfying Divine justice, and reconciling men to God. We must indeed exclude the idea that He produced a new disposition in God toward us. But what He did was to reconcile the Godhead within itself, and so to alter the judicial relations of God toward us as that He can deal with us upon a new footing. So much as this may be defined as the teaching of Scripture, from which we learn all that we know on the subject, in contradistinction to what we may guess or suppose. But this explanation leaves great mysteries, which we could explain only if it were possible for us to climb the heights and fathom the depths of the Divine nature. A consideration of Jesus Christ as the sacrificial Lamb may show us both what we can understand, and why it is impossible for us to understand more.

I.

1. Jesus Christ died, but, as we have seen, not for His own sins. He was the Lamb of God. He passed pure as a sunbeam through all the defilement of the world. His life was

like a spring of water in the salt sea, throwing its sweetness over the surrounding bitterness. He appeared, indeed, in the likeness of sinful flesh, even as the brazen serpent was made in the likeness of the serpents that slew the Israelites. "Man," says Gregory, "is freed from sin by Him who assumed the form of sin, and was made after our fashion, who were changed into the form of the serpent." But, as there was no venom in the life-giving image to which the people looked, so Jesus Christ had in Himself no taint of sin. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled; and His death cannot be understood except as a death for the sin of others. Had He not been sinless His life would have been forfeited, and it would not have been in His power to offer it up in atonement.

2. Jesus Christ died according to the appointment of His Father. They do fatally misconceive the whole evangelical system who represent the heart of the Father toward man as different from the heart of Christ. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son." It *pleased* the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, and that that fulness should be opened up in His death. It pleased the

Lord to bruise Him. Christ is the Lamb which God Himself furnishes for sacrifice. The idea that God needed to be mollified or appeased by the sacrifice of His Son is a heathenish misconception. Whatever love dwelt in the heart of Christ was the love of the Father. Whatever fulness dwells in Him to forgive and to save is the fulness of the Father. He appeared to do the will of God when He came into the world to die.

3. Not only was He the Lamb appointed by God—He was also God Himself. He took upon Him our humanity, but He took it into union with His divine nature. It was through His eternal divine nature* that He offered Himself to be a sacrifice to God, and because it was so the sacrifice was efficacious. He took human nature at His incarnation into eternal union with the Divine. The blood which He shed on the tree was the blood not merely of the Son of Mary, but of the Infinite Being thus united to a created form. Hence came its efficacy. The blood of bulls and goats secured the outward religious position of the offerer, but could not put away sin, could not operate in the sphere

* Hebrews ix. 13, 14.

of the spiritual. The blood of the eternal Christ must have a transcendent power. How great we cannot tell. The thought distances and rebukes reason. But it has power to put away sin. And this helps us to see why the doctrine of the atonement must be in a measure mysterious.

Much of the misconception which has attended the orthodox theory of the atonement has arisen from the fact that it has been unconsciously discussed on a Unitarian theory of the person Christ. The transcendent mystery which we cannot remove lies in the fact that we have in the atonement the love of the Three-one God working for man; or, as it has been expressed, the self-reconciling of the Godhead with itself, or an action of the Godhead within, and at unity with itself for our salvation.

4. The Lamb of God was also true man. He became man and entered into true sympathy with all our sufferings. He was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and He enters into vital union with those whom He came to save. And here we have another fruitful source of error arising from the question of the atonement being disposed of as if Christ and man

were entirely distinct, whereas there is between the Redeemer and the redeemed an essential and vital unity. The Christ on the cross is not some miserable man suffering for his own sins, but a representative of mankind. He is the Flower and Head of the race, the Representative of humanity, the second Adam. He becomes one with those who have seen Him as identified with them in a manner which finds its parallel only in the unity of the Triune God. Those who believe in Him live and move and have their spiritual being in Him.

5. He died of his own free will. From the very beginning His obedience was voluntary. His incarnation loses its whole meaning and value, unless we understand it as the willing entrance into our condition for our sakes of the Son of God. For our sakes He deigned and consented to be born, even as for our sakes He deigned and consented to die. He had before Him all the way what He was to pass through.* In the very beginning of His ministry, the same thought came over His spirit that crossed it at the end ; and He said that He had to be lifted up even as the serpent was lifted up in the wil-

* Cf. Delitzsch, "Jesus and Hillel," p. 184.

derness. This gives their whole meaning to His sufferings. The very essence of sacrifice lies in the spirit, and if the spirit of Jesus Christ had rebelled, or if He had been but the feeble victim of an enormous wrong, His sacrifice would have been of no value. So if the shocks and storms of life had taken Him unawares, as they take us, the meaning of that life would not have been what it is. But we know that He counted the cost—that every step of his restless wandering life brought him nearer Jerusalem, where the prophets were slain, and that He freely willed to die for us. "If I had known," we often say, "what I had to pass through, I never could have lived." He knew it all, and loaded with the weight of this foreknowledge, He went through it for our sakes.

6. His sufferings were in a peculiar sense the bearing of our sins. Looked at externally, we could not assign to the life of Jesus Christ the pre-eminence in suffering. Life has been less sweet and death more bitter from that point of view to others than to Him. Others have endured greater privations, greater physical tortures, and have had far less to up-bear and console them than He had; but, when we look

at the matter more closely, we perceive that His sufferings were in a mysterious sense the endurance of sin. Especially we see this in connection with His death. The shuddering with which He looked forward to it is not explained by the natural shrinking and reluctance of the physical frame. "We know," it has been said, "with what a piercing strength the first glimpses of a coming sorrow shoot in upon us—how they checker our whole life and overshadow all things, how sad thoughts glance off from all we say and do and listen to, how the mind converts everything into its own feeling and master thought. It is not only on the greater and sad occasions that our afflictions overwhelm us; perhaps our keenest sufferings are in sudden recollections, remote associations, words, tones, little acts of unconscious friends. And so it was with Jesus. The very spikenard had in it the savour of death." "She hath done it against my burial."* "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." The shrinking is most manifest at Gethsemane. There, we are told, He began to be appalled, stunned, smitten out

* H. E. Manning.

of Himself. His soul was sorrowful all round. His straining eyes stretched the whole horizon, and found it one unbroken pall. He was sorrowful even unto death, as if one more weight laid upon the quivering breast would have been too much. Great drops of blood fell from Him in His agony. How shall we explain that thunder-cloud of darkness, and storm, and passion, with its flashing lightnings, in which His soul was wrapped? Is there any torch which throws a ray into deep gloom save that which was put in our hands by the prophet when he says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities?" The heroic calmness and courage which marks the life of Christ makes it impossible for us to explain His fear of death in any other way. He if any had lived

> A life which dares send
> A challenge to its end,
> And when it comes say, "Welcome, friend."

He who the noble army of martyrs praise is not less brave than the bravest of that company; and yet he shrank and shuddered as none of them ever did, because in His sufferings He was to enter a deeper depth than any of them could ever know.

II.

The result of all this is, that the suffering is efficacious—"He taketh away the sin of the world." The blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin, but this man has offered up one sacrifice for sins for ever. "He taketh away;" it is not merely "He bears the sin of the world." He takes it away by taking it upon Him. Many an unconscious victim had shed its blood for the sin of the world, and yet the sin remained. Many a great heart had borne the sin of the world, and had broken under the weight, and still the sin remained. There had been many that palliated the sin of the world, and yet it remained. It is possible to disguise the sin of the world, to drive it under the surface, to cover it with a fair exterior, to make excuse for it, but that is not to take it away. It is possible to fight with separate sins of the world, and in some measure to master them, but as long as any sin remains the sin of the world has not been taken away. But Jesus came not to deal with the *sins* of the world but with the *sin* of the world. In human nature strictness in one direction often compensates itself by laxity in an-

other, and men dream that they have overcome sin when they have gained a victory in some isolated fragment of the world of moral duty. But to exchange one sin for another, as Samson the Nazarite did, is not redemption. Nor is the mere escaping from the penalty of sin redemption. Redemption means the removal of sin, not merely of the punishment of sin; and He who dealt with sin effectually by taking it away was Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone.

The *sin* of the world, not the *sins*. The victory of Christ was over sin as a unity, the whole corruption of human nature which finds expression in separate sins. The sin of the world is regarded as heaped up in one tremendous pile, and that pile laid upon the head of Christ. That was the load which He staggered under. Think of the sin of one life, the sin with which it is born, the sins of childhood, youth, manhood, age; the sins of broken vows, broken oaths, unfulfilled duties; and then multiply that one life by the numbers of all the world, and consider what a foe it was Christ came to reckon with, what a foe it was that He overcame in the body of His flesh through death.

The sin *of the world.* When John spoke of

the world he manifestly did not think of the extent of redemption. He did not mean to say that the work of Christ was effectual for all humanity, and that all sinners, no matter how they regarded Christ and His atonement, had their sins removed. He was thinking of the world, not in its extent but in its nature. He thought of the world as it is apart from and hostile to God, and the sin which belongs to the world as such. The world has ceased to be the expression of God's mind and has become his rival.* On the one side He sees the world with its sin, on the other side he sees God with His Lamb, and God with His Lamb is able to meet the world with its sin. The remedy is sufficient; the obstacle henceforth lies on the side of man and not upon the side of God. We believe that our Jesus is the Saviour of the whole world. Although only one-third of the human race is Christian even in name, we know that He is the new head of humanity, not of England or of present Christendom only, but of the whole world—that all the aimless self-denial of the Buddhist, all the Pantheistic yearnings of the Brahmin, all the loveless theism of the Moham-

* Cf. Westcott's elaborate note, "Commentary on St John," p. 31.

medan, all the blind gropings of the rude and unlettered savage will find their real rest and satisfaction in Him.

III.

The condition of salvation is to behold; and if we consider the nature of salvation we see that the condition is not arbitrary but lies in the very nature of the case. If the Gospel had been an elaborate code of laws it would not have required trust. If it had been possible through rites and ceremonies to save the soul, then the performance of these, apart from the feeling of the worshipper, would have been sufficient. But since salvation is vitally and essentially a gift that God is willing to give to man, it is clear that if man be free everything must depend upon man's willingness to receive the gift—that is, upon his faith; and so the connection between faith and salvation is simply inevitable. The look is the look of longing, of desire, of trust; such a look as the dying Israelite in the desert, where the very sand round him seemed to be hatching serpents, gave to the brazen serpent lifted on high. Then new life stole into the languid frame. It is the look that

takes hold of Christ. Appropriation, said Isaac Taylor, is the secret of dying. And it is the secret of living too. We take hold of Him, He takes hold of us, and the great old word is fulfilled—He sent down from above; He drew me; He took me out of many waters.

Round this doctrine of the Atonement man's trust and hope have ever gathered. It is the resting-place of the soul. Denounced as immoral by those who do not understand it, not thoroughly apprehended, and often much misapprehended, even by those who love it, it has vindicated itself triumphantly in its influence on faith and life through all the ages. It will increasingly vindicate itself in the experience of those who lovingly embrace it. "While there is life in thee," says a great teacher of the Church, "in this death alone place thy trust, confide in nothing else besides; to this death commit thyself altogether; with this shelter thy whole self; with this death array thyself from head to foot. And if the Lord thy God will judge thee, say, Lord, between Thy judgment and me I cast the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; no otherwise can I contend with Thee. And if He say to thee,

Thou art a sinner, say, Lord, I stretch forth the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my sins and Thee. If he say, Thou art worthy of condemnation, say, Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my evil deserts and Thee, and His merits I offer for those merits which I ought to have, but have not of my own. If He say that He is wroth with thee, say, Lord, I lift up the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between Thy wrath and me."*

* Anselm *Admonitio Morienti.*

III.

THE LAMB IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE.

Thou whose ways we praise,
  Clear alike and dark,
Keep our works and ways
This and all Thy days
  Safe inside Thine ark.

Thou whose face gives grace
  As the sun's doth heat,
Let Thy sun-bright face
Lighten time and space
  Here beneath Thy feet.

Bid our peace increase,
  Thou that madest morn;
Bid oppressions cease;
Bid the night be peace;
  Bid the day be born.

III.

THE LAMB IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE.

ONE of the ground thoughts in the Book of Revelation is that Jesus Christ, who died upon the tree, sits upon the throne of the universe. We find the thought expressed in varying forms. For example, we are told that Jesus is the First and the Last, the origin and the goal of all things. We are told that He has the key of David, an expression signifying absolute power and irresistible will. We read that His feet are as fine brass, describing His sovereign march over the fields of life. But the clearest expression of the thought is the phrase which we have chosen as the heading for this chapter, in which Jesus Christ the Lamb as it had been slain, is represented as seated on the central throne of the universe, and receiving the praises of the various orders of creation. This great thought may be viewed

under varying aspects. Jesus Christ rules the universe as Creator, Lord, and Reconciler.

I.

He rules it as the Creator. All things, according to the uniform doctrine of Scripture, were made by Christ. Whether there be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; whatever orders of being may exist, these and the worlds they people came from His creative mind and His plastic hand.

He Himself was the anticipation of creation. In the remarkable prefiguration of Christ in the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom is made to say, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth." Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God in a sense which does not depend upon the Incarnation, and which does not vanish with earth or time, but which remains when the veils of flesh and sense are lifted, and we see face to face. The ab-

solute invisible God no man can see, save as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. This Christ was the prophecy of creation, and He Himself fulfilled the prophecy. The creating power passes through Christ as its medium—"Without Him was not anything made that was made." All the products of nature are from His hand; from Him all the terms of creaturely existence take their rise, and of all life in its lowest as well as in its highest forms, He is the Distributor and Giver; so that in a manner, for all creatures, to live is Christ, whether they acknowledge it or not.

How much needed is this great and half-forgotten truth in days when men soar and roam through the universe, and find it empty of God, when everything spiritual and divine is said to be vanishing from the world before the march of Science. Nothing can be sadder than to wander through Nature and find it tenantless. But how different when we render to Christ the things that are Christ's in it all. There is nothing created, said Goethe, so mean and trifling that it is not a thought of God. But the more beautiful and tender truth is that everything created is a thought

of Christ, meant to lead us straight to him. We are, in spite of ourselves, swayed by the influences of our time. Nature often seems, even to the Christian, very stern and pitiless. It is blessed to be able to see in it all proofs of the thought and expressions of the mind of him who is not only Creator but Redeemer.

II.

Not only is Jesus Christ the creator of nature, but He holds it together. By Him all things consist, and so of all the unconscious forces in the world, He is Lord; and those who wrote over the grave of one killed on the Riffelhorn the words, "It is I, be not afraid," understood in whose hands are all the powers of the Universe that seem so blind and unreined. But, putting it more generally, Jesus Christ is the Lord of providence—the true King with plenary power. It is He who rules over the evolution of events and the disclosing of the epochs in the world's history.

There is much to confirm the thought which has visited all in hours of gloom, that history is nothing more than a shifting phantasmagoria

of passions and desires. Sometimes men seem to be flung together, a rude and chaotic mass of creatures, who fight and crawl over each other, and die, and are laid in the hopelessness of a beast's grave. Sometimes history seems no more than a series of petty stage-plays, without connection, and leading to no issue. But even sceptical thinkers admit the organic unity of all history. Only to many each event is but a link in the long chain of the harmony of the universe; to such "the organic development of history will mean the unbroken sweep of natural law, without one breath of the creative spirit from on high, while to a higher school of thought the one purpose of history is the purpose of everlasting love worked out in and through human personality by a personal redeeming God."* We see above it all the throne where the King sits, who holds all things in His hand and guides them according to the purposes of changeless love. The true exposition and idea of history are to be found in the kingdom of redemption.

* Dr Robertson Smith in "British Quarterly Review," April 1870, p. 314.

III.

Jesus Christ reigns as the Reconciler.* Old divines were wont to distinguish between two kingdoms of Christ—the one inalienable, which He possessed as the eternal Son of the Father, and the other given to Him as Mediator by the Father, and delivered over to the Father in the end.† The distinction is a real one, and is kept in view in what we say. Jesus Christ rules not only as Creator and Lord, but as the Reconciler of the universe to God.

1. In the full and deep sense, reconciliation

* In the recent life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton, the illustrious mathematician, p. 465, the following remarkable statement occurs:—Others . . . have been compelled to acknowledge mysteries of reason which prepare for and harmonize with the mysteries ascribed to religion by the Christian Church; they have felt that the Incarnation and Passion are not incredible, to those who believe and meditate on the earlier mystery of creation, that the difficulties which beset the one are the same in kind as the mysteries which beset the other; that in the region of philosophical thought an acting is a suffering God, and that whatever inclines a commencing inquirer to reject as absurb a belief in a "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, the same principle if pursued into its philosophical consequences would lead to rejecting the belief of any personal God at all."

† Compare the singularly clear and instructive discussion in George Gillespie's "Aaron's Rod Blossoming," p. 203, &c.

can only be a reconciliation of men and spirits. Only spirits can love and hate, only spirits can be turned from hate to love; and the great work that Jesus does as Reconciler—that which is most vital to us, and at the same time most intelligible — is the work which He does in bringing back those who were rent and sundered from God by wicked works to their soul's true rest and home. The carnal mind is enmity against God; not indeed that the enmity is always consciously felt, nor that it always expresses itself in blasphemy and defiance. Yet enmity it is, as all honest, thoughtful people will admit. At the very best, God is not in all our thoughts; at the very best there is a deep dissonance between our thoughts and the thoughts of God; at the very best we do not glorify Him in our bodies and spirits which are His. There is between us and Him a deep gulf—how deep and broad we cannot tell, only it seems deeper and broader the more we look into it; and to bridge that gulf, and bring us back again to God is the work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb. As we saw, He reconciles us in the body of His flesh *through death.* It was part of the reconciling process that He

should become man, and share in the experiences of humanity. But this alone was not enough. It was through death, through the bowing of His head to the last enemy, through His victory over death and the grave that He made it possible for the old fellowship between man and God to be renewed,* and so in a great and noble sense He is King over the higher universe of redeemed souls—redeemed by His blood, who offer up to him intelligent and conscious allegiance, and who bear testimony that through His work they have been brought back to themselves and their Father.

2. But, as we are taught, there is a further reconciliation. Jesus Christ reconciles not only men, but all things on earth. The reconciliation is in a sense over and done with. It lies in the past, however it may be appropriated and worked out in the future. The universal reconciliation of all things in Christ affirmed by Paul,† cannot be said to bear upon the question whether or not at some point in the future all intelligent creatures will consciously love and

* See 1 John iii. 5, as showing that the redemptive efficacy of Christ's work is to be found in His whole life crowned by His Death.

† See Col. i. 19, 20, &c.

serve God. But it cannot mean less than this, that the influence of the cross, in ways we do not understand, is felt all over the creation—that the influence goes into heights and depths beyond our ken. It cannot mean less than this, that nature itself, over which a deep shadow has passed through the sin of man, shall find that shadow vanish to return no more. And here we are on ground where speculation is vain. We deal with matters in which Scripture is our only teacher, and we find in Scripture intimations which strangely recal the latest utterances of science about the imperfection and inadequacy of nature. "The creature was subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope; because the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God." And then the mystery which so shadows all its beauties will end, all things being reconciled.

3. Still more unfamiliar and strange is the thought that Jesus Christ the Lamb is the Reconciler of things in heaven. How can those who have never fallen, who have never left the light, need to be reconciled to a God from whom

they have never been alienated? And here again it is obvious that the word reconciliation is not used in its full sense. Still it is clearly taught that all orders of spiritual being are brought near to God through the work of Christ. The angels in their errands to the world have been perplexed by its misery and sin. The angels ministered to the Son of God in the days of His flesh, and sustained Him in His agonies. In the cross of Christ the very depths of the Divine nature have been unveiled—depths of yearning, self-sacrificing tenderness which never otherwise would have been revealed to angels; and thus we read that into the mysteries of redemption they desire to look. The word "look" means a penetrating intense gaze. It is the word used to describe the sharpened, eager wistfulness with which the women looked into the empty tomb, and the statuesque unwavering gaze of the cherubim on the mercy-seat. And now the way and the end of the Divine love have been made plain to them, and they stand nearer to God than ever before.

So, then, we perceive the cross of Christ is the centre of the universe; and thus we read that

the living creatures, the representatives of creation, the elders who represent the Church and the angels who represent the higher order of spiritual being, burst out together into the great shout of triumphal praise to the Lamb that was slain, who is worthy to receive power, riches, and honour, glory and blessing. And so all His many crowns encircle the wreath that wounded Him. The Lamb as it had been slain sits in the midst of the throne.

Another aspect of Christ's kingly work, which we propose to treat in another chapter, is His punitive and destructive energy, which will end at last in the disablement and abasement of all hostile powers. They will be put beneath His feet. On the other side of the advent there may be a period of conflict with a succession of evil dominations. How distant the issue may be we cannot tell, but that period too will close in His complete victory; and then the revolt will be finally quelled, and the reign of Christ as Mediator will come to an end. "The Son Himself, also, shall be made subject to Him that did put all things under Him that God may be all in all." *

* 1 Cor. xv. 28.

Christ, as it were, had authority given to Him by His Father to go forth and quell the insurrection. So long as the rebellion lasts the Son of the King stands in the front of the fight. He leads the troops. He commands all operations till the final victory; but when that comes He takes the kingdom He has won and gives it to His Father, not quitting the throne where God and the Lamb sit in indissoluble unity, but ruling as the Second Person of the Trinity with the Father and the Spirit, God being all in all.

We conclude with two practical reflections. We have seen that all the universe and its forces are being administered for purposes of redemption. The Lamb rules and He rules as the Lamb. How calming to feel this, to look up from the turmoil of this visible, flaring, and lying world—from the shows and shams and the tinted scene of the theatre; from all in life that startles and appals, to Him who sits above it all. From Him all things proceed, and to Him they return in circular flow. The shadows are all passing; the reality is behind. Nothing lasts; our trials are all hasting away to oblivion; let the wind rave as it will, we look at the

Christ who abides. How small all our conflicts and ambitions seem to be, how transient and easily borne our sorrows, when we look up as John looked from the rock and the wild waters to the serene King, against whose changeless purpose all the waves of time and circumstance break in vain.

We have seen Christ as the Reconciler moving by the influences that streamed from His Cross all the universe in its heights and depths. There is a sense in which we must be moved by that cross whether we will or no. Hostile or friendly we must yield to it. But what will it avail us to be laid prostrate beneath His feet in the day of a triumph which, had we willed it, we might have shared? What will it avail us that all the universe is tied with blood-red silken cords to His Cross if we are trampled beneath His feet as ashes. Let us see that we crown Him as King by the willing and full surrender of heart and intellect, and conscience and life, to His command. "We are ambassadors for Christ; and as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

IV.

THE LAMB OPENING THE SEALED BOOK.

Sometimes still
I come here for a little, and speak a word
Of peace to those who wait. The slow wheel turns,
The cycles round themselves and grow complete,
The world's year whitens to the harvest tide,
And one word only am I sent to say
To those dear souls who wait here, or who now
Breathe earthly air—one universal word
To all things living, and the word is Love.

IV.

THE LAMB OPENING THE SEALED BOOK.

WE have looked on the steadying vision of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, holding the sceptre and controlling the forces of the universe; we have viewed Him as Lord of nature, providence, and the higher universe of redeemed souls; we have seen how such a thought is fitted to thrill and soothe us, and yet we desire something more. God tells us nothing about Himself merely to gratify our curiosity. It is a principle of revelation that its light is a light to guide the feet. God teaches us not in order that we may know, but in order that we may do. There is nothing given merely to make us wise, but all knowledge is bestowed to make us good. Revelation is not a mass of theories and principles, but the knowledge of His will; and hence it is that much mystery and darkness is left, and will be left. Many questions unanswered, and many problems unsolved—these

exist, and will exist. Only there are mysteries so terrible that we can hardly live and work without some rays of light on them. The burden of the unintelligible world would be too heavy were there nothing to relieve it; and so we are told in a sublime vision that the Lamb of God opens the seven-sealed Book of God's purposes and man's destinies, and our tears over the mystery of things are to be dried, and our complaints turned into praise at that great sight. It is foreign to our purpose to enter into the details of apocalyptic interpretation, suffice it to say that the book contains the key to the true knowledge of life, and that He who opens it is the Lamb.

I.

1. First of all, we have the mystery of nature. There are moods and aspects in which nature seems full of the goodness of God. Look on a summer day at the quiet meadows, the nestling homes, the delicious haze in which all is wrapt, and the whole fair land seems a haunt of peace ancient and undisturbed. Listen to the cheerful

hum that rises from animated creation, happy in so fair a home, and you are inclined to echo the saying, "It is a happy world after all." The general tendency of Christian men till recently was to maintain that nature illustrated perfectly the wisdom and the goodness of God. The exquisite skill with which her work was finished, and her instruments adapted for their purpose, the radiant blossoms of spring, the glories of summer, the golden treasures of harvest, the lavish ministration to man's sense of beauty as well as to his material needs—these were dwelt upon to the exclusion of other sterner aspects. Of late years, however, various tendencies have opened men's eyes to facts old, indeed, and always partially known, but never set in so clear a light as now. We see how the east wind blights the blossom; how the rain destroys the harvest; how the noblest and sublimest scenes of nature have, as the inevitable accompaniments of their beauty, misery and pain. We find always imperfections in the most exquisite and skilful creation; the ideal is never reached; nothing perfectly attains and expresses the end aimed at. When we look below the surface we see how, under

all the beauty, there is the tumult of the contest—how the lowest forms of life devour and are devoured, how nature is red in tooth and claw. We perceive that the law of life is a law of struggle — struggle in which innumerable individuals and species are blotted from the book of being. We perceive that the whole lower world is full of cruelty, full of acts of violence—one individual preying upon another. We see how the highest forms of animate creation are, in their turn, subdued and oppressed by man, whose sin has brought such misery to his humble friends, and has cast so dark a shadow over all the fields of life. A deeper study shows us that the first glance was superficial, and that nature is full of imperfection and pain.

2. And if the mystery of nature be great, no less terrible is the mystery of history. John wrote these words in a day of storm and earthquake, a day of overthrow and catastrophe such as the moral world had never before seen. He wrote in the age of slavery. It was the age of the amphitheatre. It was the age of blood; when life was hard, fierce, brutal — full of savagery and pain. It was the age of war;

the world was filled with terror and massacre. It was the age of famine, when people died in thousands, when the supplies of life were easily and often stopped, when sights of nameless horror had been witnessed in the endeavour to preserve existence—a dark and tragic time, leaving lurid ineffaceable tints on the pages of the book of Revelation. And yet, was it so much more terrible than other times that have been? The good old times—we speak of these; but we know, when we look soberly at the matter, that they never existed. The past was even more full than the present of misery in its various and complicated forms, and it is only because the cries of pain have died and the scenes of woe are veiled that our imagination has liberty in the far off distance, and paints what should have been, but was not. Famine, war, disease—we toss the mere words about and talk of them in a wholesale way. But let any one take, for example, the Inquisition, and seriously investigate all that is covered by that word, and this vague way of looking at things will disappear, and he will come to understand how hard of solution is the problem of history.

3. And is the mystery of the present much less great? Something has been accomplished, but how much remains unchanged and unremoved? How full the world is of blood, of misery, of poverty, and despair. Could one have believed that such scenes as have been witnessed in the wars of the last decade could ever have returned? They seem like a feverish dream, the torture, the cruelty, the massacre, the brutal defilement of the bodies of helpless Christian women, which are temples of the Holy Ghost. And even when the more terrible convulsions of society cease for a time, how awful are the miseries that go on unthought of, and unrelieved; the frightful, irremediable contrasts between wealth and poverty; the existence of the thousands and millions to whom life seems to bring no one good thing, no one good opportunity. How pathetic is the spectacle that steals into the imagination when one looks into the faces of a crowd and thinks what possibilities of happiness each has missed, what experiences of privation, disappointment, and suffering each has endured. How rayless and barren life is for the great multitude. The immense and awful gloom that broods over the world, the

"oppression that maketh a wise man mad," the hopeless tardiness of efforts to amend and retrieve, the dull and paralyzed sense of justice in the minds of those who have power — these things sometimes so crush us that we seek relief from the burden of a life at once so miserable and so powerless.

Nor less terrible is the mystery of our own life. Let any one past the first freshness of youth consider what he has had to bear, and what he knows lies waiting for him in the future—what pangs of separation, what bitterness of disappointment, what agony of hope deferred. If all these troubles seemed to be sent to soften and sanctify they would not press upon us as they do; but many seem almost as if they were designed to harden us. The dear ones are taken from us whose love softened our hearts and opened them to better influences; the hard earnings of a lifetime are lost when we were planning how to lay them out in the service of God; the voices which spoke bravely for Christ are silenced, and the hands are tied that gladly did His bidding. The purposes and plans of our life which had least of selfishness in them, those efforts in which we humbly and

sincerely sought the good of His kingdom come to utter ruin and defeat. Can we not join in the tears of him who wept much: "I wept much." "The words, 'I wept much,' can only be understood by those who have lived in great catastrophes of the Church, and entered with the fullest sympathy into her sufferings. Not without tears was the book of Revelation written, and not without tears can it be understood." Doubt has been called the last trial of the sons of God, and it is perhaps the most terrible. Yet this was not a failure of faith, but the outburst of a heart loving God and his fellow-creatures and the light. The light came when the Lamb took the book.

II.

The Lamb opens this seven-sealed Book. The fact gives us not by any means a complete solution of mystery. Perfect understanding of all things may be beyond our capacities, and the power of tracing the golden thread of love which unites God's ways, is a gift for the hereafter. What we receive is light enough to

enable us to work and suffer and wait, patiently abiding God's time.

1. The Lamb opens the seals, because He shows us God's heart. The question that tortures us is:—"Does God care for our suffering? If there be a God, is He a being enthroned in an eternity of passionless bliss, who looks untroubled on the struggle and wreck of the world? If He does care, why does He not interpose, why does not His mighty hand turn back the tide of evil and suffering, and bring in rest and joy?" Such questions have ever perplexed the heart, and will perplex it until the Revelation of the Lamb is understood. Nor will it be sufficient for us to believe, as devout hearts always have believed, that the great God on high in his eternal years, must pity the frail and fading creatures of a day—that His great heart must be touched with ruth at the sight of our miserable struggles, our sad environment, and our inevitable defeat. There may be comfort in such a thought, but it is not all the comfort that we need; and, besides, we want something that will prove it. Now, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ the Lamb, not only gives us a new view of God's pity, but

it gives us what was wanted as much, and that is an undeniable and irresistible proof. It gives us a new view of God's pity, for it shows us not a God having compassion from the heights of the throne, but a God who of his own will left these heights, and came down into the depths of mortal darkness, that He might understand by actual experience, those evils which He had to relieve. It shows us a God with human eyes, filled with human tears; a God who has made trial of the strangest, most humbling, most afflicting experiences, and who has not shrunk from the crowning and final proof of love—giving up His own life. The compassion is turned into sympathy, and is far more welcome and dear because it comes from one who stands by our side, and not from one lifted infinitely above us in the glories and the eternities. But not only have we this new revelation of God's feeling towards human suffering—we have it actually verified to us. In the Cross we gaze into the depths of God's heart; and in that tremendous and unimaginable event, God dying upon the Cross for human sins, we see a proof, that never can be shaken, of God's love towards men.

One may see something of the new light Christianity has brought into the world, by looking at pictures which may sometimes be seen hanging side by side—the glowing deities of the classic religions, in the ecstasy of sensual bliss, and the Son of God, with streaming wounds, and a face of pain and sorrow. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." The very centre of our religion is a suffering man. "If God made the world," said the pessimist philosopher of Germany, "I should not like to be in the place of God; its woes would break my heart." He knew not what he said. The woes of the world did break the heart of God manifest in the flesh.

2. Again, there is rest and peace in the thought, in the measure in which we make it ours, that the government and destinies of the world belong to the Lamb. He who died for the world, has in His hands the empire of the world, and with that empire He has all power given unto Him. Can we not trust Him? Surely He has done much which ought to make trust easy. He has shown His love for the world by dying for the world, and the care of

a world which He loved so well, and for which He did so much, may surely be left quietly in His own keeping. He alone knows the ways He must travel to reach His great end. Verily, His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known; nevertheless, He leads His people like a flock. Why should we not trust Him? Why should we grieve Him with our doubt? Shall we doubt the love that died, and shall we seek to wrest the destinies of the world from the wisdom and power, and love of the Lamb? Most restful and blessed is the thought, that He to whom all power is committed, is He who has shown that He knows best how to use it.

3. Again, the Cross shows us how, what seems at the time to be irretrievable and unalleviated disaster may be the chiefest blessing. When Jesus Christ died, the very strongest faith was overwhelmed. All forsook him and fled, and even those who seemed to have entered furthest into the meaning of his mission were hardly braver than their neighbours. He died lonely, forsaken by men, even by those who might have been expected to cling to him longest and last. Nor is this very wonderful, for to human

eyes it seemed that the Cross of Jesus meant the defeat and the extinction of all his hopes. It is hard for us looking back, with the history of Christianity in our minds, to understand the depth of the darkness which wrapt God's ways, even to the most faithful, when Jesus was crucified. We know now that the Cross is the spring of all Christian life. We know that the death of Christ has poured the life-blood of a new hope into the heart of the world ; we know that the Cross turns not back but goes on ever to win new victories. Let us take the light of that Cross and throw it upon all other smaller crosses. Does it not throw its light upon the shadows of nature and show us the meaning of the great law of sacrifice that rules there ? We see in nature not a mere blind and purposeless waste of life, but a striving towards a fair end of things. Nature is ever seeking to repair waste places, and to cover desolation with loveliness, and the final result of all the struggle will be beauty, and a true and gracious issue will be reached when the pain is past, and a universe will exist in which nothing will be deformed or fading. The teaching of St Paul on the vanity of creation is one of the many thoughts of scrip-

ture that has not yet been thoroughly incorporated into the Christian consciousness. He recognised as clearly as the latest men of science the existence of a law of struggle, and the misery thence arising. But to him these pains were the birth throes of a new creation. He refused to believe with scientific teachers that the groaning and travailing of creation will end in stagnation and despair. Life is not to cease when anguish ceases, creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. "God will restore to a perfect state the world now fallen together with mankind."*

And the same is true of history. Looking back on the darkest and most disastrous times, on volcanic eruptions which seemed for the time to devastate the earth, we see that they were needed for the clearing of the air, for the overthrow of tyranny, for the entering in of a better time.

In the lesser trials of our own life we see the working of the same principle. We can look back on the old dead griefs and see how they were all intended to bless us, and how Christ

* See Calvin on Rom. viii. 20-22.

was with us in them. Let us learn to see him by our side in the present furnace, to speak with Paul, of sufferings in which we *now* rejoice. In the very moment of the intensest pressure of the pain, when the iron is entering into our souls, let us be aware of the love that chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.

He himself sustained his faith so. Remember how when the Greeks came to him a transient pang seized him at the thought that so great and fruitful a work was to be so soon arrested by death. But he recalled that his shameful uplifting on the tree was to be the true glorious elevation to which the world was to turn. He remembered that death was to be infinitely more fruitful than life. He projects the shadow of the piece of wood on which he was to be lifted a few feet from the ground into the heaven of heavens, and says, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." These who had come to him were but the first ripple of the full tide of humanity that was to roll shoreward to his feet. His Cross was his throne, and its light is flung back on all the lesser crosses of Nature and of Man.

V.

THE WARRIOR LAMB.

Workmen of God ! oh lose not heart,
But learn what God is like,
And in the darkest battle-field
Thou shalt know where to strike.

Thrice blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when He
Is most invisible.

Then learn to scorn the praise of men,
And learn to lose with God,
For Jesus won the world through shame,
And beckons thee His road.

V.

THE WARRIOR LAMB.

IT has been said truly that the reach and scope of Christ's gospel are so large, that we cannot follow all its lines. There is an under-lying unity which we cannot thoroughly master—the action of a great principle, which we are not able to express except by a paradox. Thus Christianity binds together statements apparently intensely opposed, and we are prone, for refuge, to fall into the easy and misleading habit of accepting one side of the truth and ignoring the other. In Jesus Christ paradox reaches its climax. All contradictions meet in Him, and are reconciled so quietly, so without strain or effort, as to assure us that in Him we have found the full truth. He is the Lamb, the very ideal of innocence and gentleness, and yet He is the Judge, the enemy, the warrior. And here we have Him figured as the great antagonist of the beast, whom He

is ultimately to subdue. The spiritual lesson is the same, whatever view we take of the person before the apostle's mind, and whether or not we believe in a future historical realisation of the vision. It is sufficient for our purpose to say, that the beast represents that element in man against which Jesus Christ fights. We shall look at two things—First, the foe; and secondly, the manner in which the Lamb fights against him and overcomes.

I.

First, then, we have the beast—the foe in man. As we have seen, when John wrote this book, the power of the beast seemed dominant in the world. Forms of evil, strange, terrible, and overpowering, prevailed and made themselves manifest in glaring and appalling clearness. Now, while the power of the beast element in man is not now so palpable, while there are signs, as we shall see, that it is in a measure weakened, not even the blindest can deny the extent and the depth of his sway. It is true that great efforts have been made to disguise the hideous face of evil. It is true, speaking generally, that in our popular literature the

worst forms of animalism are suppressed, and the delicacy and reticence of society in speaking on certain themes, or rather their complete banishment, are to some extent proofs of progress. It is true that the slaves of evil and the tempters to evil do not ply their trade so unrestrainedly as once they did, and it is true that the hearts and consciences of Christian people have been awakened, as perhaps never before, to their responsibilities in connection with the disfigurements and perils of national life. But, after all, is there much to congratulate ourselves upon. In our great cities the forces of the law seem to be paralysed in the face of certain iniquities which lift themselves unabashed, and press themselves in their most hideous forms upon the notice even of the most innocent. The best and the most earnest lovers of their kind, have been driven into the deepest perplexities as to how legislation is to cope with evils that seem almost too great for its force. Many of the purest and noblest spirits of our time have been forced to the conclusion, that it is hopeless to expect the destruction of certain evils; that nothing more is possible than to regulate and control them. Nor is there so

much to congratulate ourselves upon in our literature. The taint may not be so gross, but it is there, though in a subtler form, and not less seductive because it is somewhat disguised; and though much is suppressed, we have now and then terrible indications of what lies behind and beneath that silence, and finds expression in its own place and time. The development of intellect and culture has done nothing to destroy the power of beasthood. Nay, the intellect has often been used to devise new refinements of sin, and from under the decorous exterior, ever and anon leap out startling manifestations of the animal. Even in the best this power is often agonisingly felt. Some of the holiest lives the world has ever known have been darkened and shortened through struggles with the animal nature—the changed soul in the unchanged body, fretting in its prison. And this is the explanation of the astounding falls from high position and profession that often terrify us, and which lead all wise men to pray with St Augustine—"The Lord deliver me from that wicked man myself." It is not our business to inquire how far the intellect itself is distorted and perverted through the passions. A

striking phrase in one of the prophets says, that the sins of the people are written upon the horns of the altar, and much of our popular religion, with its poor and shallow conceptions of sin and righteousness, may take its rise from man's sin. At any rate, the fact remains that the power of the beast, is as it has been, the mightiest in the world.

II.

Against this enemy the Lamb of God wars. We shall consider his war mainly as the Lamb of God, but there is another side which must not be overlooked.

1. The punitive and terrible side of Christ's nature is manifested in his war against sin. That there is such an aspect of the gentle Christ is clearly taught in the Old Testament, where men are warned to kiss the Son lest He be angry, and they perish in the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. The revelation of the New Testament does not supersede although it supplements the Old. It is in this book of Revelation that we read of Jesus Christ having eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass —eyes of flame to show His knowledge of man's

sin, and the indignation it kindles in him, and feet like fine brass to show the active energy which follows upon His clear perception of evil and His indignation against it. We must take the whole Christ as He is presented to us; and indeed the beauty and preciousness of the gentle aspect is greatly limited, and lowered when we ignore the other side in which he appears as the Judge and Avenger of evil.

This punitive and destroying energy of Christ is a fact of history as well as a fact of Scripture. All along history we have examples of institutions contrary to the will of Christ which have suddenly perished, not merely from an internal process of decay, nor because of the power of their enemies amongst men, but simply by the destructive energy of a Christ who, grown weary of them, lifted his heavy foot to crush them. When friends predicted a long lease of life, when foes were faint at heart because the strength opposed to them seemed so great, in a moment, to the amazement of all, such institutions have suddenly vanished to the utter confusion of too confident prophets.

We do not need to go further back than to the crash of slavery in America. How little

likely that seemed from any human point of view, and yet how sudden, complete, and miraculous the overthrowal was, hardly explicable, save as a manifestation of the destroying energy of Christ.

Why and when does Christ use this destructive power? He uses it because these things cannot be sanctified, and He uses it when the last hope of reformation from within has utterly vanished. Then force becomes a remedy, and force is applied. Hoary tyrannies, blood-cemented, are thrown to the ground. Churches, institutions, nations, individuals are visited with complete destruction, trampled beneath His feet in ruin. But this never happens until every hope of reformation is exhausted. Christ is able to turn with clean hands to a watching world, and say of every institution thus visited, "I gave her space to repent." His patience exceeds our own, and often when we say, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" He answers, "Let it alone this year also." Only, His coming in judgment, if it be slow, is sure, and institutions which will not listen to the voice of pleading and warning may hear the sound of the approaching footfalls of the Son

of God coming to destroy them. The destruction He inflicts is complete. When some great evil vanishes from the world we know assuredly that, come what may, that horrid head at least shall never be reared again. With that wrong we are done for ever. When Christ does His work He does it effectually.

2. Although, as we have said, force in one sense is a remedy as against irreclaimable foes like these, yet there is a sense in which force is no remedy, for the true victory is the victory over the will. That is the victory which Christ values—not the victory of destruction, but the bringing of the rebellious will into loving allegiance to Him. And so He fights against the beast by His cross. His apostle, Paul, took for the motto of his strange and bold invasion of the world, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross." The antagonist to the sin of man is the grace of God in Christ.

(1.) The cross tells us, first of all, that the antagonist of sin is not man, but God. Man's antagonism to sin has always been short-lived and futile. All experience teaches that man is not able to prevail against sin. Our own experience is full of testimonies to the same truth

to the vanity of our resolutions and struggles, to our certain and absolute defeat. Now, to men who, having lost hope, have almost given over the conflict, the cross is the message that God has taken the field, that He has ceased any more to be invisible, far off, or questionable; that He has come to us in the person of His Son to help us in our else vain struggle against faults, and sins, and crimes. How wonderful the change from questioning whether there was a God at all, from conceiving Him, if we believed Him to exist, as an Avenger and a wrathful Judge! We pass into a certain and clear knowledge of God—a knowledge which shows Him as the friend fighting for us in the battle against sin.

2. The cross tells us that the attribute by which God fights against sin is His love. The very fact that Jesus Christ appeared in the flesh showed that God had made common cause with us; and the fact that Jesus died upon the cross is the declaration that upon God's part all hindrance is removed, and that His will, yea, His yearning desire, is that men should be reconciled to Him. It is by the sunshine of His love that He melts our hard hearts. Force is

no remedy. Force may break in pieces the ice, and yet every fragment remains hard; "sunshine makes it flow down in sweet water that mirrors the light that loosed its bonds of cold." The thunder of threatening may appal us, the power of God may humble us and crush us, but it is the love of God that brings back the lost, and wins the wayward heart, and quenches the fire of lust, and makes us His true children.

3. The cross tells us that the crowning attribute of God is love. Love, as it were, is throned and sceptred, and uses all the other attributes of God as her tools and instruments. They all are but the "ministers of love, and feed her sacred flame." God is love. This is the message, above all others, that has gone to the heart of the world.

4. Jesus Christ fights with His cross, and behind the cross are the energies of the Spirit. The cross is preached by faithful men who have Christ's spirit in them, and work in a strength which is not their own. Jesus Christ is represented in this book as the Lord of the seven spirits and the seven stars. He differs from all other teachers in being able to pour out His Spirit; and the way in which this Spirit works in the world is generally through men called,

and chosen, and faithful, who are filled with that Spirit, and gain victories through its power. He has, as it were, in one hand the full flagon—the seven spirits; in the other the empty vessel—the seven stars. He pours life from one into the other. And when a Church is dying He sends stars—men like Wesley and Whitfield—to blow the embers into flame; and every one fighting in this war of the Lamb has behind him, if he seeks them, the energies of this Divine and all-victorious Spirit.

So then our confidence in the spread of religion depends on this—"I believe in the Holy Ghost." All opposition outside the Church, and all scepticism within it, are met by this answer. If we are sure that it is the war of the Lamb that we are fighting, then no matter what opposition of circumstances there may be; no matter what combinations may be formed against us; no matter what earthly obstacles and difficulties may rise; we are to do our work with cheerful confidence, springing from our trust in the Divine Spirit, who will not fail us, and who is stronger than them all.

III.

Such is the war the Son of God is fighting, and after eighteen hundred years of this war of

the cross, what are we to say of the results? Is the cross marching on to victory? Now, whatever history lay behind us, we should have to say of what lies before us that "our hopes are bright as the promises of God." But is it possible for any one to look on the history of these years and not see the onward march of the cross of Christ? Christ our Lord was a new birth. Christianity was a new energy breathed across the world. It is not without reason that all the years since He came have been called years of the Lord. The innumerable lives of virtue, the deathbeds of triumphant peace, the hundreds and thousands in every land who have not counted their lives dear to them for His sake, the innumerable host of believers taken home, the great company still militant, the energy and the hope with which Christianity has ever gone forward to annex new fields—these are enough to rebuke our despondency, and to assure us that the Lamb is to conquer in His war.

And what changes the cross has wrought upon society! Much that is evil still lingers, but, compared with the time of John—as one of our chief thinkers says—life seems now like a trained

and serious manhood beside a wild and passionate childhood. And if there is much that still discourages and depresses us, let us remember that evil is to grow as well as good. Both grew together until the harvest. We wrestle with invisible powers, not affected by the progress of civilization, nor moved, save to enmity, by Christian influences. These forces exist, they have existed, and they will grow. Let us not be surprised at new and malignant outbreaks of the powers of evil—outbreaks which men of the world would indignantly deny to be possible. Many students of Scripture believe that as evil and good both grow, so at last they will come in conflict at the end of the world in a great struggle, in which the evil will be utterly put down, the close of the dispensation thus being in an evening red with blood.* Whether it be so or not, let us not be alarmed at evil, not terrified by its growth. Let us behave as those who have been warned of this, who are prepared for it, and who are assured through all of the final triumph of the good.

2. How are we who are engaged in the war of the Lamb to look upon our weapon? Turn

* Compare Martensen's Christian Ethics, vol. ii., p. 356.

back and we see how in the worst and most fatal storms, the hopes of the kingdom of God and its springs of recovery have never been destroyed. Turn back and see how its language is for the many, not merely for the few. See how it meets the needs of the highest as well as the lowest—of Shakespeare, and Bacon, and Newton, as well of the poor who can hardly spell the words they trust in. Even as all men are equal before the facts of life, so all men need equally the grace of God in Christ. See how Christianity still exists after everything that undermines and ruins ideas and institutions has done its worst. See how even in our own day it still sends the thrill through men that it sent through them at first. See how in an age of culture the coarsest and crudest form of Christian teaching moves and sways the hearts of men, stirring them to the very depths. And shall we give up a faith like this, with all the overcoming and regenerating forces that are stored in it, with all its powers for righteousness, and all its hopes for men before the ominous aspects and prophecies of the hour, because of the ways of thinking of some of the leaders of the present generation? God forbid.

"O Lord, in Thee have I trust, let me never be confounded." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." The bearer of this standard alone we count upon in the spiritual conflict wherein all Europe is engaging or engaged. "All the old signs and quarterings will soon be in the dust. The proudest banners of the earth are already tripping up their clansmen, or are bound in shreds around wounds they cannot staunch. If God would send us some young brave spirits to spur bareheaded in the stifling tumult, with a cross displayed on a fair white field, we might again subdue the world." *

* Sydney Dobell, Life, i., p. 184.

VI.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB.

Jerusalem makes melody
  For simple joy of heart,
An organ of full compass she,
  One tuned through every part.
While not to day or night belong
Her matins and her even song,
The one thanksgiving of her throng.

Jerusalem, where song nor gem,
  Nor fruit nor waters cease,
God bring us to Jerusalem,
  God bring us home in peace.
The strong who stand, the weak who fall,
The first and last, the great and small,
Home one by one, home one and all.

VI.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB.

I.

THE various descriptions of the state of final blessedness in connection with the Lamb rest upon two great principles, with which we start.

1. The state of heaven is a state of grace. The entrance is through the grace of redemption: the blessed have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It was by grace that we were called from the state of trespasses and sins into the life of Christ. It is by grace that we are comforted in our sorrows and upborne in our conflicts. It is grace that helps us to die peacefully, and it is grace to which all is due, when our palm-bearing hands are at rest and the fight lies behind us, and we sit down with the Saviour, who has overcome, in the new kingdom. There is never a moment in which any enjoyment of eternity is to be

ascribed to our own desert, and this is one great reason why the state of heaven is represented as a state of praise. The praise is the utterance of the gratitude of full hearts, which praise because only praise can speak their feelings, and do not cease praising because they never cease receiving, and because all that they can express of thankfulness leaves a great deep unuttered. Why do they sing? It is because speech is too weak to tell what they feel. Words are the feeblest language of the soul. How poor an instrument is speech for the great multitude who never acquire any real mastery over it, and who feel it rather a bar against which the tide of feeling breaks, than a channel for the full river of emotion to flow in. Each of us has felt in trying to put into words our grief, our gratitude, and love, that we have not been able to tell the half. If this is felt on earth, how much more is it felt in the deeper hearts of heaven, and is it wonderful that they try to utter themselves in praise? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," they sing, because He has redeemed them to God by His blood.

2. The other principle is that the experience of the Church on earth and that of the Church

in heaven are essentially the same. Glory is only the superlative degree of grace. Grace is glory in the bud; glory is grace in the flower. A golden thread of unity ties together all the experiences and possessions of the Christian, from the time that he first opens his eyes on the light, on through the endless pulses of an unbroken eternity. And the way to feel heaven real, and to desire it as we should, is to have Christ dwelling richly in us now. Paul, in arguing for the reality of a life to come, built upon the great fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In one sense that is the final proof of immortality. The great mountain wall which bounds human experience and human life is cloven in one place. Through the narrow pass come gleams of light, and a way is disclosed by which the fair form of hope may lead us on and on through the darkness. But the final proof to the Christian is "Christ in you the hope of glory." When we are tempted to think that "this little life-boat of a world with its noisy crew of mankind will vanish like a cloud speck from the azure of the all," we remember *Christ in you.* Like a light in the cabin of a ship tossing on the stormy sea it marks a path across the

waters, refuses to be extinguished by all the tempests of life, and will, we know, outlive the last winds of death.

It has been said that the belief in immortality, even the desire for immortality, have become weak in our day; and it has been suggested that the faith and the desire will revive if the future life ceases to be considered as a state of blissful idleness, and comes to be viewed as a prolongation of all noble energies and all generous activities. It may be so, but it is more certain that the result will be reached if here on earth Christians have a deeper experience of the preciousness and the power of Christ. If a higher type of Christian life becomes common it will be felt impossible not to believe that grace must of necessity be crowned and consummated in glory.

II.

The description of heaven we have chosen under which to group the rest is that in which the Church triumphant is described as the Lamb's wife. This very tender and deep conception occurs elsewhere in the Bible, and involves various ideas.

1. The Bride is presented in perfect purity. In Oriental manners it was indispensable that there should be one to give away the bride to her bridegroom, and the Apostle Paul, speaking of that last great time when humanity shall be wedded to her true husband, says that the Church shall be presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Pure in virginal beauty shall she stand before the perfect judgment of God, shaking from her all fault and stain, as water is shaken from the white wing of the swan as it rises, the end of her Creator and the desire of her husband being satisfied at last. Not only will there be perfect purity—the absence of every speck of dust—but the purity will be lustrous. Clothed in fine linen, clean and white, means a very sunburst of purity, dazzling and brilliant, drawing all eyes. Then shall the righteous blaze out like the sun in the kingdom of the Father. The armies of heaven follow Christ not in armoured steel, but in the fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints.

2. The state of heaven is a state of love. Only one thing is the same in the Christian as in God, and that is love. All other emotions

and parts of the religious life in us correspond to something in God, but they are not the same. Our obedience to His commandments, our faith in His promises, and such like, are, as it were, concave, to receive the Divine convexity to which they correspond. But love is the same.

He that dwelleth in love, says the apostle, dwelleth in God. He that *dwelleth*, not going into the sacred habitation for a moment, and then bustling out into the market-place, but day by day, night by night, inhabiting the secret place of the Most High. How different this calm, perpetual thought of God from the existence we most of us lead—fleeing to God in our trouble, and leaving the refuge in still weather. Here love is weak and secret, there strong and confessed. Here it is a little spark, there a great clear flame. Here doubtful and misty, there made perfect, so that we have boldness in the day of judgment before the light of the earth that streams from the great white throne. As in the old story, the prince who wooed and won his bride in the disguise of a beggar, brought her to the capital city and the king's palace, took leave of her on some pretext, and caused her to be led all shrinking and solitary

into the chamber. When she looked she saw on the throne her lover, her husband, and all fear fled. So the Bride, the Lamb's wife, wooed and won by Him, being found in fashion as a servant, lifts up her eyes and sees on the throne the old face she has learned to love, and is very glad and confident. Her love is made perfect, she has boldness in the day of judgment, and goes to dwell with love for evermore.

3. The next idea involved is that of perfect confidence. That is essential to any happy marriage—full mutual trust. In the blessed state all mystery shall have ceased, all pain, and all doubt. That does not imply that we shall know everything. The thought of eternity would be awful and confounding if it were not that we have to spend it with an infinite God. No ghastlier vision has risen before our later seers than that of an immortality without God. If eternity had to be spent with the limitations of finitude we should grow weary and sick of life. The endless existence would become intolerably burdensome. Our joy is that Christ is exhaustless. Only there will be no mysteries, no locked doors in His palace—doors infinite, but every one of them opening to our touch—to be

explored throughout the endless ages. We shall understand His purpose and read His heart—close to Him as a loving wife is to her husband.

4. Again, the image carries with it the idea of satisfaction. Each satisfies the other; each ministers to the happiness of the other. He satisfies us. We are told that He does so by ending all our sorrows and fulfilling all our desires. He wipes every tear from our eyes. Life has been so difficult and so hard that even at the entrance into bliss there linger on our cheeks traces of what we have had to bear, but these He removes, and they never return. There is no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. The shadow of the curse is for ever gone, and the former things have passed away. The virtue which is one of the highest in our present state, that, namely, of resignation, needs to be exercised no longer; only, as Butler says, it is by the practice of this virtue that we have been prepared for the time when it is no longer necessary. There is a complete absence of everything that once disquieted us—no shadow left upon past, present, or future.

He supplies our needs as they rise. He feeds

us and leads us by living fountains of water. The Lamb feeds us; the Shepherd is of the same nature as the flock, and knows their needs and supplies them. A very important part of the symbolism of the Paschal Lamb was that after it was sacrificed it was eaten by the family. So we feed upon Christ; all our wants are supplied from the exhaustless treasury of His own nature. As if this were not enough He leads us by living fountains of water — the deep fountains that flow by the throne. No desire is indulged in vain, all are met to the full.

On our side we satisfy Him. His servants shall serve Him. His slaves, more literally, shall serve Him as priests. The word "slave" in this book loses all its associations of humility, and is lifted up to a position of transcendent dignity. We spend eternity in the exercise of activity and obedience. Heaven is a prolongation of the multiform activities of life in their intensity. If men have cherished the idea of a lazy psalm-singing heaven, they have not found it in the Bible. Here are words that we might have found brand new in some magazine of the month—"His servants shall serve Him." Only all their service is to be priestly service. Even

down here, the commonest acts of our life done with a thought of love "as to the Lord," flash up into worship.

> "Nothing can be so mean,
> But with this tincture for thy sake,
> Doth not grow bright and clean."

Consciously related to Him and advancing His glory, we serve as priests.

After a certain experience of life the craving of most men is for rest. The word seems to hold in it everything that is good for them. They have become so weary of the labour and the conflict that they desire to be done with all for ever, and nothing attracts them like the description of the place of rest. But were the rest reached, after a time it would become more irksome than the labour. The faculties would crave to be again employed, and so we read that heaven is a state of perfect rest, and at the same time a state of intense activity. Only there is nothing here of the modern adoration of work. Life, it has been well said, is not for learning, neither is life for working, but learning and working are for life. While they work they gaze on His face. Meditation and contemplation so hard to combine in this

life in fit measure are perfectly united there. The Martha and the Mary, whom we so rarely find in harmony, do not any more conflict with one another. We dwell in Him in peaceful contemplation, in quiet communion, in meditative gaze, and at the same time we serve Him with all the perfected energies of our being.

And by meditation we satisfy Him even as by action. The great desire of Christ for His people on earth is that they should remember Him. He loves their service, but He does not value a mechanical activity that takes no thought of Him, and does not consciously render itself up to Him. "This do," He said, "in remembrance of Me." In heaven His love is satisfied by His ever dwelling in the faithful heart of the bride, and by her faithful eyes never being taken away from His face.

Besides this, we satisfy Him by perfectly reflecting His character. His name is written on our brows. His character is visible and manifest before all who look. As the servants of the great Antichrist bear the marks of the Beast, so the spirits of the just made perfect bear the mark of Jesus. His name is His character, and the image means that His face paints itself

upon ours, that, mirror-like, we reflect His beauty. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

III.

In conclusion, it may be asked, what light do these meditations throw upon two great questions often and earnestly asked?

1. Shall we know our friends in heaven? One after another they fall by our side, till at last a shadow is cast over every good-night and good-bye, and life comes to be a journey into the wilderness, there to die alone. Yet we do not cease to love them and desire them. Long lost, they are longer dear; and the question we put is—"Is the Love of the Lamb so jealous and so strong as to absorb and consume all meaner passions, leaving no room for any but the one affection?" The answer is to be discovered by putting another question—"Do we find that our love for Christ weakens our love for those who share with His supreme affection?" Is it true that all who love one another

before they were in Christ, love one another less when they pass from darkness into light? Is it not emphatically the contrary? Are not all other loves hallowed, ennobled, and eternised by this other affection? The love of Christ includes our love for all those who are in Christ. It intensifies and perpetuates the earthly affection, and any heavenly love that does otherwise is diseased and perverted.

> "He who being bold
> For life to come is false to the past sweet
> Of mortal life, hath killed the world above.
> For why to live again, if not to meet?
> And why to meet, if not to meet in love?
> And why in love if not in that dear love of old?"

"The sun, the more bright, and glorious, and gladdening, and life-elevating it is, is not necessarily on that account the only thing to be looked at and thought of; it is seen in the light it gives, and thought of for the delight it gives. So even in another world may it be with God: the clearer we see Him, the better and more rightly may we see and know all besides Him, all His creatures, and all that He has made. We have no reason to think that our fellow beings will be less interesting to us

or less cared for by us there than here. It is the nearer presence and the clearer view of Him which will be the source of the truer understanding of and better sympathy with them." *

2. Another question is, Can we conceive of heaven as material or is eternity to be thought of under spiritual conceptions which bar the efforts of imagination? In reply, we say that the fact of the resurrection of the body implies that heaven is a place in some sense material. The imagination may dream as it will. Conceive if you will all that you most desire—the old home, the old hill and streams, the dear old faces, for no conception will come near the reality. The highest hopes of future blessedness are wise, and modest, and sober, when we consider who it is that is preparing the place, and for whom He is preparing it. But many will be content to leave it to Him. He knows best. When His time comes He will make it known to us. He is busy behind the veil with a tender thought for every separate soul that is at last to be with Him. He prepares a fitting place

* From a suggestive fragment, "On a Future State," by the late Professor Grote. *Cont. Rev.*, Aug. 1871.

for each; and, when the right moment comes, He will put forth His hand and roll back the curtain on its rings. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world."

Then—when sun nor moon,
Time nor death finds place,
Seeing in the eternal noon
Thy face.

Then—when tears and sighing
Changes, sorrows cease,
Living by Thy life undying
In peace.

Then—when all creation
Keeps its jubilee,
Crowned, discrowned in adoration
Of Thee.

VII.

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB.

Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae,
Ne me perdas illa die.

Me remember, Saviour—one,
For whose soul Thy course was run,
Lest I be that day undone.

VII.

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB.

THE idea of the element of wrath existing in the character of God is most unwelcome to many minds, and still more unwelcome is the thought that it should be an attribute of the gentle Christ. But Christ came to reveal God, the whole God—not an incomplete and limited deity. Hence we should expect to find not one side but all sides of God represented in Him. Thus, the real question is not, whether wrath exists in Christ, but whether it is an attribute in God. Now we accept the fact that it is so, not merely on the ground of scriptural statements, not merely on that of actual experience, but for the reason that in every complete and strong moral character the attribute of wrath must exist. Few essential elements of human nature have been so distorted and perverted as this, and so generally associated with sin. But this does not prove that sin is necessarily connected with anger. There is a

righteous indignation, however rarely it may be seen in man—an indignation which is a passion in behalf of order, truth, righteousness, purity; not a heat of revenge springing from personal grudge, but a quality essential to a perfect nature, and this we find in God the Father and in Jesus Christ the Lamb of God. It is impossible to define this feeling. We may state its effects, but the feeling is an ultimate one incapable of analysis.*

To complete our picture of the Lamb of God the shadows must be inserted as well as the light. But we do not mean to enter into the large and difficult questions connected with the future of the wicked. We merely touch upon those lights thrown upon that future by the expression which heads the chapter, "The wrath of the Lamb."

I.

The wrath of the Lamb is primarily the wrath of a rejected Redeemer. It is indignation not so much against sin as such, but

* Hence the fallacy of such definitions as "the self-vindicating attitude of the divine mind." That is not the feeling, but one of its results.

against the sin that refuses to accept and trust Christ.

Every careful reader of Christ's life must have observed that sin did not affect Him with the shudder and recoil that we should have expected. We should have imagined that one who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and cannot bear to look upon evil, would have turned with horror and shrinking from the manifestations of the power of sin that met Him on every hand. But, instead of that, we find that He speaks of sin calmly. We find that He sits with publicans and sinners as their guest, and exposes Himself to the taunts of those who call Him a glutton and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners. A writer on the life of Christ has attempted to explain Christ's attitude when the woman taken in adultery was brought before Him, as caused by shame. When He cast his eyes down to the ground and wrote upon it, and did not lift them until the people were all gone, His cheeks, it is supposed, were suffused with the blush of shame. Many readers may have perceived the unsatisfactoriness of this without being able to give a reason for their feeling. The reason may

be here. We might, any of us, have blushed at such a sight, but our blush would have been a confession of the solidarity of the race—of our share in our sister's sin. But He knew no sin, and, knowing no sin, knew no shame. Where shame exists sin exists. He was pure from sin, and so He looked upon our sins, not with the consciousness of one who has been or may be guilty of the same misdeeds, but as God has looked and does look.

Very different is His attitude towards one particular sin on which the conscience of the great majority scarcely speaks at all—the sin of unbelief. There are many who would be struck with shame and terror if they had committed any other great sin who are never visited by one pang at the thought that they are committing this. But to Christ it was the sin of sins. He marvelled at it, we are told. It seemed to Him the most astonishing and unreasonable thing in the universe—the one unreasonable, indeed —for although there are thousands of excuses for it, reasons there are none—excuses enough to build a wall between the soul and its Saviour, but no reason. The one inexplicable thing in the universe is neither God, nor hell, nor

sorrow, nor sin—it is unbelief. That men should look at Him and not trust Him—that men dying for want of love, and peace, and hope, and rest, should refuse to put out a finger to grasp them when they are all put within their reach—this is the real wonder of the universe. That men should believe that they are to die and face judgment and eternity—should know that they need salvation, and that Christ is the Saviour, and yet do nothing—that is the one thing that moves the marvel of Christ; and it was that which moved His tears. He wept over the city that refused to be gathered. It moved His anger—this hardness of men's hearts. His breast was shaken with wonder, and sorrow, and pity, and anger at the sin of sins—unbelief. A homely illustration may help to make His feeling clearer. If we had within our power a remedy which could heal every disease to which flesh is heir, I suppose we should not look much at the diseases, but urge the taking of the remedy. We should not care to listen to the varied tales of pain and sorrow poured into our ears; we should say, it is enough that here is a remedy to meet every need. And if it were conceivable that any

should refuse the remedy, that refusal would seem to us so strange and so terrible that we should have no power to think of anything besides. That may be how it seemed to Christ; He knew that He could heal all the world's disease and meet all the world's need; and the wonder of wonders and the pain of pains was that needy, dying men should refuse Him.

So the sin for which the Lamb will judge and visit with His wrath will be primarily the sin of unbelief, the sin of rejecting Him in His great salvation. "Could the despisers of Christ's love be well pleasing to God, love would declare its own work superfluous." This comes home specially to all who have heard the message of the Gospel. Whatever light there may be in the future for those who have never heard, there is darkness for those who, having heard, have rejected and disbelieved; and the darkness comes because they refused. "The sin rendering the individual absolutely bad can only be the personal guilt of rejecting Christ, in which, of course, rejection of good itself is included, and therefore acquiescence in all other possible sin." *

* See Dorner's "Christian Doctrine," iv. 423.

II.

The wrath of the Lamb must be a wrath that can be justified. It is not like so much of the anger of this world, unreasonable, hasty, and vindictive. It is the wrath of the Lamb, most gentle, most pitiful, most merciful, most long-suffering. Some have said that the wrath of the Lamb must be terrible because it is love turned to anger. There is no fire, it has been said, like the sheen of a dead affection; no enemy like one that has once been a friend. "To be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the brain." But while this is true of men, we cannot affirm it in the same way about Christ, because this very excess of resentment and passion is often an infirmity and a sin. We may say that in Christ, as the flame of love is purer and stronger, so the flame of anger may be; but we cannot say that anything in His anger is passionate or vindictive.

The truth pressed on us is that we shall have no defender when the Lamb ceases to plead for us. No one is so abundant in the resources of mercy and patience, and when His resources are exhausted, on whose shall we fall back? One of

the greatest difficulties in connection with future punishment has been how to understand the happiness of the blessed in connection with the misery of the lost. How can we be glad in heaven while they are punished in hell? Now, whatever the punishment of sin may be, this at least is certain, that it will be a punishment that will meet with the complete acquiescence of the whole moral universe. That is the meaning of such texts as "Again they said Alleluiah, and her smoke rose up for ever and ever." That seems terrible, but how much more awful if they did not acquiesce; how much more awful if the lost went to their doom with the sympathy of the blessed. Nor would it be enough if the blessed merely resigned themselves to the will of God in this dispensation. The only solution that can be borne is that the justice and righteousness of God in the punishment of the lost are so completely vindicated, that the blessed will suffer them to go to their doom without one tear or pang.

Here we touch on a dark and perplexed subject. But are there not indications even in this confused existence which help us to understand it? Are those really the most merciful

who refuse to condemn sin and crime? Are there not crimes that move a man to thank God that Tophet is ordained of old? Do not even the most merciful feel sometimes a joy in the thought that the cruel, the brutal, and the wicked have been brought to their punishment and their doom? What is thought of the moral state of a country where murder and outrage prevail unchecked by public opinion, and where those convicted of the most brutal crimes perish with the sympathy of their fellows? Is this not held rightly to show that the land has been demoralised, that conscience has been stupefied or deadened, and is it not regarded as showing the necessity for moral awakening, so that crime shall be looked on in its true light? When those who have power and wealth given to them use the power to crush and oppress the weak, who does not heave a sigh of relief when the long tyranny of such a life is ended? Who does not rejoice that the strong one has met with the stronger at last? When the purest and noblest feeling of the soul is perverted into a vile and cancerous passion, destroying the objects on which it feeds, who will protest when retribution comes to the seducer? Is there not

such a thing to be seen on earth as even the most blind and faithful love opening its eyes and turning away—father and mother saying at last, "Every spark of divine light has gone out, and I can love no more." And may it not, must it not be supposed that there will be a similar acquiescence in God's judgment at the last? that the judgment, whatever it may be, will not shock, revolt, and confound the moral sense, but will carry with it the full acquiescence of every pure and righteous spirit? In saying this we by no means assent to the monstrous doctrine—ultimately subversive of all religion—that our consciences here give us no real knowledge of good and evil. Nor do we deny that there are theories of future punishment to which the conscience could never in any future consent. What we affirm is that the punishment of the wicked, be it what it may, will commend itself to the conscience of the righteous, and will be recognised even by themselves as just. The lost soul "has been under an infinitely beneficent system of trial. Everything he has known of God has assumed the benign form of a dissuasion from sin; his experience has generated countless motives to obedience; his steps have been thronged by

them as by pleading spirits; but for his guilt his conscience alone would have been an ever present song of God's love to him; if he has had Christian training the disclosures of redemption have opened upon him the most intense system of allurements to believers known in the universe; the teachings of wise men, the prayers of good men, the visions of inspired men, and the ministrations of angels, have stretched a cordon of holy sympathies around him; the cross of Christ has blocked his way to destruction more impassably than by a flaming sword; intercession in heaven has been made for him with hands uplifted in which were the prints of the nails; the Holy Spirit has striven to turn him back by all the devices which infinite ingenuity could frame at the bidding of infinite compassion; his history has been one long struggle against obstacles to the suicide of his soul; he has sought out, and discovered, and selected, and seized upon, and made sure of his own way, over and around and through them to the world of despair. *He* has done it—he, and not another. Such is every lost life. Is it any marvel that a lost soul is speechless?" *

* See Austin Phelps "Human Responsibility," and Dorner as above, p. 423.

III.

The wrath of the Lamb is a personal infliction. Some have sought to relieve the difficulties connected with this question, by saying that future punishment is simply a self-executing law of the universe, the inevitable consequence following upon transgression. But to accept such a doctrine would be to withdraw the punishment of sin from the conscience of the sinner. Punishment would then simply work upon fear, and on nothing beside; and righteousness would come to be nothing more than selfish prudence. Now, on the other hand, the Bible view represents sin and righteousness as a relation between persons. Duty is more than the recognition of a naked law; when we commit sin we wrong others, and we wrong a power which bound us not to wrong them. The punishment of sin is to come face to face with that living power and be judged by it at last.*

In the whole discipline of our life, Christ strives to bring us face to face with Himself.

* See Wace's "Christianity and Morality," p. 53.

Wherever we meet with even the least of His brethren, we meet with Him. He is sick, sad, unvisited. He shivers unclothed, He languishes in prison, He is the stranger that knocks at our door. It is He whom we persecute, when we lift our hands against His truth. He feels afresh, as the old hymn says, "what every member bears." When we reject His messenger, we reject Himself. He meets us at every turn of our life, and the thought of Him is inseparably bound up with the familiar objects and actions of our existence. He is the way, the truth, the life, the bread, the water, the door, the shepherd, the star, the sun. To everything He has attached some association of Himself, that we may, as it were, live face to face with Him; and so whenever we commit sin we deal with Him, and we grow at last into the meaning of this old agony of confession—"Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned."

Scripture teaches that a day is coming when the whole account of the universe shall be summed up, and when all shall receive the due reward of their deeds. The world's history is not of itself sufficient to be the world's judgment. Christ will sit upon the great white

throne upon that day, the central figure to which all eyes turn. We shall come face to face yet more unmistakably with Him with whom we have been dealing all our life. We shall see Him there as Judge whom we knew of old as Saviour, and He will judge every one of us according to our works. What will give its power to the judgment will be that He judges—He who died for us. The intense moral effort that it costs a God of infinite love to deal thus with the sinner, will give the judgment its power over the conscience and the heart. We shall come face to face with Him who wept over Jerusalem, and the eyes that were once as fountains of water will be as a flame of fire. It is a terrible thing to be ground in pieces by the law, but much more terrible to fall into the hands of the living Christ.

So much we may affirm; but many questions rise to which we can give no answer. There are awful breadths of promise and doom which our Lord has not seen good to light up, and into which our search is vain. This much is clear, that "the New Testament is a very severe as well as a very hopeful book. It takes a very severe view of the world, and of the

ways and conduct of men. And certainly our Lord's own teaching is not the least stern part of it. Look at it carefully and you will find how large a proportion the language of rebuke and warning bears to the language of consolation and promise; the one is as grave, as anxious, as alarming, as the other is gracious beyond all our hopes. . . . Of the closing retribution our Lord has used words and figures which have graven themselves deep in the memory and imagination of mankind—the eternal punishment, the fire that never shall be quenched, the worm that dieth not, the place of torment prepared for the devil and his angels. What could our Saviour mean us to understand by all this? Surely He did not mean simply to frighten us. Surely He meant us to take His words as true. We may put aside the New Testament altogether; but if we profess to be guided by it, "is there anything but 'a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation' for obstinate, impenitent, unforgiven sin, sin without excuse and without change."*

So He turns round to us as of old when we put

* hurch's "Human Life," p. 102.

our questions, and says, "Take heed to yourselves." Our own personal and separate interest let us at least make sure of. He is the Lamb; none perish that put their trust in Him. Let us trust Him for ourselves—for what we know, for what we do not know. Through all the awful hazards of the future He will lead us if we cling to Him. Passing the time of our sojourning here in fear, we shall be kept by the power of God; and at the last He will shew us His salvation.

When earth and sea shall empty all
Their graves of great and small;

When earth wrapped in a fiery flood
Shall no more hide her blood;

When mysteries shall be revealed,
All secrets be unsealed;

Then Awful Judge, most Awful God,
Then cause to bud Thy rod,

To bloom with blossoms, and to give
Almonds; yea, bid us live.

I plead myself with Thee; I plead
Thee in our utter need;

Jesus, most Merciful of men
Show mercy on us then;

Lord God of Mercy and of Men,
Show mercy on us then.

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